

# Examples...Programs that are working

These innovative ideas are included to inspire new ideas. They are just a few of the many valuable efforts Washington communities are making to protect youth and reduce violence. They serve as examples other communities can adapt to local needs.

*"Empowerment is knowledge, skill and understanding to help us work together."*

—Superintendent Terry Bergeson  
Youth Safety Summit Remarks  
August 19, 1998

## Options for Youth

In the Yakima Valley community of Sunnyside, many young people saw *hanging out on the streets* as the only thing to do on Friday and Saturday nights. Local citizens formed the Sunnyside Unity Now community coalition, to offer safe recreation alternatives that are free of alcohol, drugs and gang conflict.

Sunnyside Unity Now created a committee of young people to suggest activities their peers would enjoy. The gym and cafeteria of the local high school provided space, local police provided security, and the Yakima County Community Public Health and Safety Network provided a small grant to fund events.

The first Options for Youth event was held in June 1997. About 50 young people showed up for music, ping-pong, basketball, board games, and a snack bar. The following Friday night, attendance doubled and kept increasing throughout the summer. The program stopped when the school year began and started up again in February.

From February through March 1998, as many as 400 teenagers attended the Saturday night events. Fifteen to 25 adults volunteered, including local disk jockeys and reserve police officers. Last summer Options for Youth events were held only once, because the high school was being remodeled. Events are planned for this fall.

Options for Youth events run from 6:00 p.m. until 1:00 a.m. Most participants are between the ages of 11 and 16, about 60 percent are boys and 40 percent are girls. In the future, sponsors hope to offer programs in job readiness, cooking, anger management, conflict resolution, and other healthy life skills.

Options for Youth is a good example of youth working with a community of adult volunteers and local agencies. Youth offer ideas for the events, the Sunnyside School District provides space, the City of Sunnyside Parks and Recreation Department provides insurance coverage, the Sunnyside Police Department provides security, Sunnyside Unity Now organizes the events, and the community donates their time.

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*"We can celebrate a growing number of genuine heroes: people who have literally saved the lives of young people by giving them the time, the role models, and the opportunities they need and deserve."*

—Governor Gary Locke  
Youth Safety Summit Remarks  
August 19, 1998

## Clark County School Re-Entry Program

Clark County gives expelled students a second chance to finish their education. The School Re-Entry Program matches academic studies with outdoor education, counseling, social skills training, and community service work.

Since Educational Service District 112 started the program in 1995, over one hundred 12 to 18 year-old students from six school districts have become Re-Entry students. They were referred to the program by juvenile authorities, school districts, and their families.

Students learn conflict resolution, mediation, negotiation, communication, team-building, anger management, goal-setting, and decision-making skills. Enrollees must agree to avoid gangs, drug and alcohol use, and disruptive or violent behavior. Parents must agree to participate fully. They also continue regular schoolwork.

Students work through four levels of accomplishment. They must petition instructors and justify their achievements to progress to the next level. The program is self-paced, usually requiring six to nine months to complete successfully. Each week includes outdoor education, a full-day academic program three days a week, one day a week in community service work, and weekly group meetings with parents or other significant adults.

Nearly all Re-Entry students have prior criminal convictions, and about half were involved with gangs. Most were expelled from regular schools for violent behavior. About half successfully complete the Re-Entry program and continue their education, while half either withdraw or are expelled from Re-Entry for behavior or truancy.

Girls are likelier to succeed in Re-Entry than boys, but success rates are about the same for minority and non-minority students. Those who succeed in the program are 1.5 times likelier to avoid criminal activity than those who withdraw or are expelled. Nine out of 10 students who succeeded in Re-Entry returned to school or graduated. Only half of those who did not succeed in the program returned to school or graduated.<sup>1</sup>

When student behavior endangers others, expulsion may be the only recourse. In Clark County, these high risk students can avoid permanent academic failure through the Re-Entry Program.

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<sup>1</sup> Clark County Juvenile Services  
*An Evaluation Report: The Clark County School Re-Entry Program*, Education Service District 112 Evaluation Center, June 24, 1998.

*"Every child, every young person, and every adult of every age has the power to make a positive difference."*

—Governor Gary Locke  
Youth Safety Summit Remarks  
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## **First American Spirit Team**

In Whatcom County, about 30 middle and high school students participate in the First American Spirit Team. FAST is an extracurricular club for Native American and Hispanic youth. Club activities promote leadership, enhance cultural pride, and prevent behaviors like dropping out, substance abuse, and delinquency.

FAST organizes after-school activities and promotes positive relationships with adults. Last year over 400 youth and adults participated in a FAST basketball tournament, a dance, a trip to Tillicum Village, and other events. The Bellingham School District and Whatcom County Community Network supported these events.

This fall students are making a video promoting abstinence from sexual activity, tobacco, and other drug abuse, with assistance from KVOS-TV. Constructive activities like this have helped to cut in half the number of detentions and expulsions among FAST members, and tripled the number who plan to graduate.

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## **Orting Youth Activities Council**

Rural Orting turned quiet Saturday nights into fun for local youth. The Greater Pierce County Community Network, Orting School District, civic groups, businesses, and the police department joined forces to sponsor constructive after-school activities.

The first Saturday evening program featured a University of Washington quarterback, basketball tournament, karate demonstration, music, and refreshments. Over 600 children and families attended. Two hundred youth attended the second event, which featured a volleyball tournament, sumo wrestling, and a presentation by a Washington State Patrol commander.

The third event was a dance for 300 kids. All of these evening programs were held in a local school for middle school and high school youth.

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*"We need to teach kids to learn and think."*

—Superintendent Terry Bergeson  
Youth Safety Summit Remarks  
August 19, 1998

## **Second Step Curriculum**

Second Step teaches violence prevention to kids from preschool through middle school. In early childhood, violent behaviors often begin as name-calling, bullying and threats. Second Step teaches children to use social skills to deal with conflict and anger. The lessons also help children who are targets of aggression.

Students learn to identify and predict other people's feelings, reduce stress and redirect anger. They are taught problem-solving methods and effective communication. They practice social skills like empathy, impulse control, and anger management in the classroom. Class discussion, teacher modeling, and role playing reinforce these lessons so they become healthy habits.

To supplement classroom instruction, Second Step includes a video-based program to help parents reinforce these social skills at home. Research has shown the importance of consistent messages at home and at school in shaping children's behavior. Parents can reinforce the lessons, when they can see how their children are learning to communicate feelings, solve problems, control anger, and deal with conflict.

The effect of the Second Step Curriculum on second and third graders was studied recently by the Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center at the University of Washington. The second and third grades of six Washington State schools using the Second Step Curriculum were matched with six others that did not.

Researchers observed the behavior of nearly 800 children before Second Step lessons began. Second Step was taught once or twice a week for 35 minutes. Two weeks later, the children were observed again. The lessons lasted 16 to 20 weeks. Six months after the program ended, the children were tested again.

The study found that children who had participated in Second Step engaged in about 30 fewer "aggressive" actions per day after completing the program. Those who had not participated became more aggressive. A longer-term study is underway.<sup>2</sup>

Second Step was developed in 1986. It is used in about 10,000 schools in the United States and Canada, and a Spanish language version—Segundo Paso—is available for preschool through fifth grade.

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<sup>2</sup> Grossman, Neckerman, Koepsell, and Rivara,

*The Effectiveness of a Violence Prevention Curriculum Among Children in Elementary School*, Journal of the American Medical Association, vol. 277, no. 20, May 27, 1997, pp. 1605-1611.

## The Neutral Zone

When juvenile arrests in Mountlake Terrace increased 63 percent in four years, it was clear that more needed to be done to deal with gangs and youth living on the streets in north King and south Snohomish Counties. In 1992, the Police Department, school district, and citizen volunteers opened The Neutral Zone, to give high-risk teenagers a safe place to get away from gang pressures.

Between 10:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m. on Friday and Saturday nights, a local grade school gym and classrooms become The Neutral Zone. Recreation is the main attraction, but it also offers teens help with education, health care, drug and alcohol counseling, referrals, and mentoring by concerned adult volunteers. Food and clothing banks also serve kids in The Neutral Zone.

Funding comes from the city, corporations, and foundation grants. Additional funding from Americorps allows the program to serve 85 to 200 youth each night, and offer jobs to 35 high-risk youth each year. A high school/GED education program operates six nights a week year-round in The Neutral Zone. And, it is open five afternoons a week for middle-school children to get help with homework, anger management counseling, and other services.

Peer-to-peer programs include a "Girls Group" to build self-esteem and offer education on suicide intervention, job search training, and alternatives to violence. Americorps volunteers recruited from The Neutral Zone provide services in a local alternative high school and several elementary schools. They also work on service projects like graffiti removal and a community garden.

In the first five years since The Neutral Zone started, Mountlake Terrace police noted a 25 percent drop in violent crime and a 17 percent drop in reported vandalism and malicious mischief. A 1994 study by researchers from Washington State University called the program "an innovative gang intervention that is being successfully implemented." This praise was based on direct observation, focus group interviews, and crime statistics.

Over 80 percent of the youth interviewed said they attend The Neutral Zone "almost every weekend," and 68 percent said they would be "on the street and getting into trouble" if it weren't available. Youth also cited the people they met, including police officers, as one of the most beneficial parts of going to The Neutral Zone.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Thurman, Giacomazzi, and Reisig,  
*A Process Evaluation of the Mountlake Terrace Neutral Zone  
Gang Intervention Program*, Pullman, WA:  
Washington State University, August 1994.

*"We owe it to our children to make sure that they have a solid foundation on which to build lives that are rich in kindness, in community, and in personal responsibility."*

—Governor Gary Locke  
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